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OVERVIEW OF PAST, PRESENT AND PLANNED FUTURE WORK BY THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS ON POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES

Note by the secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Conference decided at its 1983 plenary session to review a project in its programme of work in depth on an experimental basis at its 1984 plenary session, and it selected for this purpose the field of international comparisons (project 12.3.2.1). The Conference concluded at its 1984 plenary session that its in-depth review of this project had been a useful and successful experiment. Consequently, it decided to conduct another in-depth review of a major element in its programme of work at its 1985 plenary session, and agreed in this connection to review work on population and housing censuses conducted under project 12.4.3. This review is intended to provide the Conference with an opportunity to assess the nature and types of work that it has undertaken in the past on population and housing censuses, and to consider possible new types of work on censuses which it could undertake in the future.

2. The present note focuses attention on work done in the past and on work now under way or planned for the future by the Conference on population and housing censuses. Several countries have offered to prepare supplementary papers as an input to the Conference's review of this project (documents CES/533 to CES/537), and it is anticipated that most of the national reports will focus their attention on new types of work on population and housing censuses that the Conference could consider undertaking in the future.

II. PAST WORK ON POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES

3. Aside from the exceptions described later, all of the past work on population and housing censuses undertaken by the Conference has related to the preparation of recommendations for population and housing censuses for countries in the ECE region. Three different sets of recommendations have been prepared, one for each of the 1960, the 1970 and the 1980 rounds of censuses, and each of the sets constituted a regional variant of parts of the corresponding world recommendations. In view of the fact that the ECE recommendations constituted a significant contribution to the preparation of the world census recommendations, in each of

these census decades the Conference co-ordinated its work on the preparation of the ECE regional variant closely with work planned by the United Nations Statistical Commission on the preparation of the world recommendations and with related work undertaken by the United Nations Statistical Office and the other regional commissions. The Conference also co-ordinated its work in this field closely with related work undertaken by other intergovernmental organizations in the European region (e.g. the CMEA and the EEC).

4. The first set of census recommendations which the Conference drew up was the set prepared for the 1960 round of population and housing censuses. These recommendations were drawn up by a Working Group which had been established by the Conference for that particular purpose. The Working Group met four times, in 1955, 1956, 1957 and 1958. Although the participants at these meetings ultimately dealt with the entire set of draft recommendations for the 1960 censuses of population and housing, the bulk of their attention was devoted to reviewing, revising and improving various types of classifications which had been proposed for use in the 1960 round of censuses, such as the classification of persons by status (as employer, employee, etc.), the classification by type of activity in the economy (e.g. economically active, not economically active) and the classification by socio-economic categories. It is interesting to note that this last classification was a relatively new feature of population censuses at that time, that the 1960 round of censuses was the first time that many countries in the region used such a classification in their censuses, and that even in the 1980 census recommendations the ECE regional variant was the only one which contained a classification according to socio-economic groups. The Working Group completed its work in time to submit its results and conclusions to the Conference at its seventh plenary session (Geneva, June 1959), where they were adopted as the recommendations for the European region for data to be collected and made available from censuses taken in or around 1960. The recommendations were in the form of a "European Programme for National Population Censuses" and of a "European Programme for National Housing Censuses". The recommendations in the European Programmes 1/ were consistent with those given in the World Programme, but they covered a wider range of subject and were more detailed in a number of respects than either the World Programme or the other regional variants.

5. In conducting its work on the preparation of recommendations for the 1960 round of censuses the Conference realized that the task was a large and complex one, and therefore it decided to begin work on the preparation of recommendations for the 1970 round of censuses sooner than it had for the 1960 round. Accordingly, it reconvened its Working Groups on Censuses of Population and Housing in 1961 in order to enable them to review the extent to which national statistical offices had implemented the European Programme and to exchange information and views on the experience which had been gained in the 1960 round of censuses. A series of meetings was held by the Working Group on Population Censuses and also by the Working Group on Housing Censuses over the course of the

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1/ These recommendations were published as European Population Censuses: the 1960 Series and European Housing Censuses: the 1960 Series (CES Statistical Standards and Studies No. 3 and 4, respectively).

next several years, and the two groups identified several topics in their respective work areas on which further work was required to enable improved recommendations to be prepared for the 1970 round of censuses in the region. Some of the topics which were dealt with by the Working Group on Population Censuses were problems which had been experienced by some countries in applying the recommended definition and/or classifications of, for example, occupations, languages, the economically active population and levels of education. The Working Group on Population Censuses worked on these matters, and through a Group of Rapporteurs which had been set up to deal with work on more specific and specialized areas, also dealt with other matters such as economic characteristics, dependency statistics, fertility statistics and family and household statistics. The Working Group on Housing Censuses approached its task in a similar manner, and dealt with matters such as statistics of buildings, definitions and classifications of housing units and rooms, and classifications by type of ownership, by tenure status and by single or shared occupancy. By early 1968 the two Working Groups and their respective Group of Rapporteurs had completed their work, and therefore the Conference was able to review their findings and conclusions at its sixteenth plenary session (Geneva, June 1968), where they were adopted as the new set of recommendations for use in the 1970 round of population and housing censuses in the ECE region. 2/ As had been the case with the earlier set of recommendations, the 1970 recommendations identified the topics for which data were to be collected, set out the recommended definition and classification for each topic and outlined the recommended tabulation programme for each type of census.

6. In planning its future work on the preparation of new recommendations for the 1980 round of censuses, the Conference found that most countries experienced fewer difficulties ith applying the 1970 recommendations than had been the case with the 1960 recommendations, and therefore there was a general consensus among the members of the Conference that the content of the 1970 recommendations remained largely valid for the 1980 programme. Accordingly, meetings on the preparation of the 1980 recommendations were not convened until 1977. Once again, a separate Working Group was established for each type of census, and the two groups held a total of three meetings in 1977 and 1978 to work on the preparation of the new set of proposed recommendations for the 1980 round of censuses. The Working Group on Population Censuses dealt primarily with certain classification issues (e.g. the classifications by socio-economic groups, by educational attainment and by urban and rural areas), but it also did a considerable amount of work on the census question "relationship to the head of the household", which is the basis for the formation and presentation of data from the census on families and households. This latter work was necessary because several member countries had reported that the term "head of the household" had become unacceptable to a growing proportion of the population in their countries and that its continued usage would create public relations problems in the next census. As a result of these difficulties, the Working Group considered several other possible wordings for this census topic and ultimately adopted "relationship to the reference member of the household" to replace the earlier term. The Working Group on Housing Censuses also dealt primarily with classification issues in its meetings, and it introduced amendments to several classifications which

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2/ The 1970 recommendations were published as the European Recommendations for the 1970 Population Censuses and the European Recommendations for the 1970 Housing Censuses (CES Statistical Standards and Studies, Nos. 13 and 15 respectively).

had been developed for use in earlier censuses (e.g. the classifications of housing units by availability of bathing facilities, by type of toilet facilities, by type of heating and by type of water supply system), and developed a new classification of housing units by main type of energy used for heating purposes. The two Working Groups completed their work in time to permit the Conference to adopt the new set of recommendations for the 1980 censuses of population and housing at its 1977 plenary session. 3/

7. During the course of the last three decades the Conference has acquired a considerable amount of experience in revising, refining and improving the recommendations that provide countries in the ECE region with guidance in planning and carrying out their population and housing censuses, and this experience will undoubtedly assist it in preparing a new set of recommendations for the 1990 round of censuses tailored to the needs and circumstances of countries in this region. Based on the experience gained in the last three rounds of censuses, the work associated with the preparation of an updated set of recommendations for a new round of censuses may be summarized in the manner described below.

8. First, the following tasks are involved in preparing a new set of recommendations:

(i) issuing a questionnaire to obtain detailed information from countries on the extent to which they complied with the most recent set of recommendations (by the secretariat);

(ii) analysis of questionnaire responses and preparation of meeting documents summarizing the extent to which countries in the region complied with the most recent set of recommendations in terms of recommended topics, definitions, classifications, and tabulation programme used (by the secretariat);

(iii) holding meetings to examine the documents referred to in (ii) above, in order to determine which parts of the existing recommendations are in need of revision and to draw up new draft versions of those parts which are deemed to be in need of revision; and

(iv) obtaining, through the meetings referred to in (iii) above, a wide degree of consensus among member countries on the list of basic and additional topics to be included in the updated set of recommendations, on the recommended definition and classification to be used with each of the basic topics and on the recommended tabulation programme for the two types of censuses.

9. Second, with reference to the method of work, it should be noted that the secretariat plays a lead role in performing the tasks listed in points (i) and (ii) in paragraph 8 above and that national statisticians play a lead role in performing the tasks listed in points (iii) and (iv). In addition, it should

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3/ With the exception of the parts relating to household and family statistics and the urban/rural classification, which were drawn up later and approved by the Conference at its 1978 plenary session. The 1980 recommendations were published as Recommendations for the 1980 Censuses of Population and Housing in the ECE Region (CES Statistical Standards and Studies, No. 31).

also be noted that in the past efforts were always made to avoid possible duplication between the work undertaken on the preparation of the new set of recommendations by the regional commissions on the one hand and by the United Nations Statistical Office on the other. This can be seen, for example, in the decision taken by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its eighteenth session (1974) concerning work to be undertaken on the preparation of the recommendations for the 1980 round of censuses, in which it agreed that the regional commissions were to take the lead in developing the recommendations for the 1980 programme with regard to the topics to be covered, while the Statistical Office was to attempt to compile and analyse material on national census experience relating to the organization, timing, staffing and costs of various census operations with a view to preparing appropriate guidelines and recommendations on these matters. One other aspect of the method of work on the preparation of census recommendations should also be noted, and that is that the work on the preparation of recommendations for housing censuses is undertaken by the Conference in collaboration with the ECE Committee on Housing, Building and Planning, in compliance with the decision which was taken by both bodies in 1967 in which they agreed that further work on housing censuses should be carried out under their joint auspices.

10. The above paragraphs provide an overview of the types of work that the Conference has done in the past on the preparation of recommendations for successive rounds of censuses and of the methods of work used in its project on population and housing censuses. Although the preparation of different sets of recommendations is the main activity which has been undertaken in the project, from time to time other types of work related to censuses have also been performed under the project in the past. For example, in view of the fact that a large part of the work on the preparation of the 1980 recommendations had been completed by mid-1977, the Conference decided at its 1977 plenary session to add an item on census methods and procedures to the agenda of the meeting on population and housing censuses that had previously been planned to be held in November 1977 to finalize the remaining unfinished portions of the 1980 recommendations. Thus, this meeting also was able to consider several supplementary topics during its November session (the use of postal techniques to collect census and related data, the design of census questionnaires, and methods of controlling the quality of field work including the handling of refusals to reply). A second illustration of work undertaken in its project which did not relate to census recommendations was the Seminar on the Evaluation of Census Results and Methodology which the Conference convened in Rome in May 1984.

11. Finally, it should also be noted that work related (directly or indirectly) to population and housing censuses has frequently been performed by the Conference under <u>other</u> projects in its programme of work. The following are examples of some of this other work: (i) topics which have been considered at meetings on statistical methodology in the past (e.g. methods of reducing non-response and its effects on the quality of statistics, methods of imputation, etc.); (ii) edit and imputation procedures, considered at past sessions of the Working Party on Electronic Data Processing; (iii) miscellaneous census and EDP related topics considered at the Joint Meeting of the Working Group on Population Censuses and of the Working Group on Electronic Data Processing held in Washington in May 1968; and (iv) the substantive topic on the possibilities of replacing, either totally or partially, exhaustive statistical inquiries such as population and housing censuses by administrative registers, which was considered by the Conference at its thirtieth plenary session.

III. PRESENT AND PLANNED FUTURE WORK ON POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES

12. The Conference's work on the preparation of a new set of recommendations for the 1990 round of population and housing censuses for the ECE region will, by the time of the thirty-third plenary session, have reached the stage of being generally at the end of the work referred to in item (ii) in paragraph 8 above, or at the beginning of the work referred to in item (iii) in that paragraph. The May 1985 informal meeting on population censuses will have been held, and thus the Conference will also have before it that meeting's conclusions concerning, inter alia, which portions of the 1980 recommendations member countries feel are in most need of revision, as well as the meeting's recommendations on the types of preparatory work to be done by countries and the secretariat in connection with the preparation of a revised set of recommendations. An examination of the work previously planned to be undertaken in this project in the future (CES/527, Annex I, programme element 12.4.4) shows that a meeting similar to the May 1985 one, but focusing instead on the portions of the 1980 recommendations relating to housing censuses, is planned to be held in September 1985, and that the formal meeting which is to review the results of the two informal meetings and the draft new set of recommendations is planned to be held in February 1987. It should be noted in this connection that this time-table is generally in line with the related work planned by the United Nations Statistical Office on the preparation of a new set of recommendations for the 1990 World Programme, for the United Nations Statistical Office anticipates that the new set of draft world recommendations will be able to be submitted to the twenty-fourth (1987) session of the Statistical Commission for consideration. 4/

13. Although the secretariat does not anticipate that a major revision to the 1980 recommendations will be needed in order to draw up a new set of recommendations for the 1990 censuses, it should be noted that some revision might be required or advisable in order to take account of the following work:

(a) the new concepts and standards concerning statistics of the economically active population (e.g. the ones concerning the employed, particularly those in self-employment, the unpaid family worker and the unemployed) which were contained in the new Resolution concerning statistics of the economically active population, employment, unemployment and underemployment adopted by the 13th International Conference of Labour Statisticians in October 1982;

(b) the work under way in the ILO on the revision of the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO);

(c) the work under way in the United Nations Statistical Office on the revision of the International Standard Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC);

(d) the results obtained in the UNSO-ILO detailed review and revision, as appropriate, of the international classification of status in employment; 5/

4/ See the report "World Population and Housing Census Programme, 1985-1994" prepared for the twenty-third (1985) session of the Statistical Commission (E/CN.3/1985/12, paras. 45 and 61).

5/ For further details, refer to the report "World Population and Housing Census Programme, 1985-1994" (E/CN.3/1985/12, para. 42).

(e) possible views expressed by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-third session concerning other classifications of relevance to the 1990 census recommendations, such as the classification of socio-economic groups and the classification of the not economically active population; 6/

(f) the conclusions reached by the participants at the May 1985 Informal Meeting on Population Censuses and at the September 1985 Informal Meeting on Housing Censuses and their assessments of the adequacy of the 1980 census recommendations for the countries in the ECE region;

(g) the conclusions reached by other meetings convened by the Conference concerning possible limitations now found in the 1980 recommendations (e.g. by the January 1983 Meeting on the Co-ordination of Statistics of Households and Families concerning the definitions of households and families (CES/494, Annex I, paragraphs 1-12), and possibly by the forthcoming May 1985 Meeting on Socio-Economic Classifications (CES/546, Annex I); and

(h) the conclusions reached by the Conference itself during the forthcoming plenary session in its in-depth review of the project on population and housing censuses.

14. As can be seen from the above partial list, 7/ the extent to which the 1980 census recommendations will have to be changed may be greater than has been thought thus far. The situation in this regard should be much clearer by the end of 1985 than it is at present, for by that time the results of the Statistical Commission's deliberations on this topic, of the Conference's deliberations on this topic and of the May 1985 and September 1985 informal meetings on population and housing censuses convened by the Conference will all be available. In addition, the results of the Expert Group Meeting on the 1990 World Population and Housing Census Programme will also be available by that time. The Expert Group Meeting has been tentatively scheduled to be held in October 1985 in New York, and it is expected to consider the implications on the 1990 census recommendations of the work completed or under way referred to in items (a) to (e) in paragraph 13 above, to review a set of draft supplementary recommendations on the 1990 World Programme and to examine various other census issues that have emerged in recent decades (see paragraph 16 below), and therefore its results and conclusions could have an important bearing on the content of the new set of recommendations for the 1990 round of censuses.

15. It should also be noted that in addition to the work planned by the Conference on the preparation of the new set of census recommendations, there are at least two other important activities related to censuses that have tentatively been planned for the future in the Conference's programme of work. The first one is the possible future joint meeting between EDP specialists and population and housing census experts to consider computer related aspects of these censuses, which the Conference agreed at its thirty-second plenary session should be convened under project 12.2.1 of its programme of work (ECE/CES/24, paragraph 122). The second one is a meeting which could be held in the early 1990's (e.g. 1993 or 1994) to review the results of and the methodology used in the 1990 round of censuses in the region (i.e. a meeting similar in purpose to the 1984 Seminar on population and housing censuses which was held in Rome under project 12.4.3 of the Conference's programme of work.

6/ See also E/CN.3/1985/12, para. 25

7/ Some additional factors which could be taken into account in preparing the new set of regional and/or world recommendations are described in paragraph 16 below.

IV. OTHER POSSIBLE FUTURE WORK ON POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES

16. The preceding section provides an overview of the work on censuses that the Conference had already planned to undertake in the future in its programme of work. In addition, the Conference may also wish to consider including other types of work related to population and housing censuses in its programme of work, either under programme element 12.4.4 or some other programme element. The following are some illustrations of some other types of work related to censuses which could also be incorporated into the Conference's programme of work in the future:

(a) further work on the possibilities of replacing either totally or partially, population and housing censuses by administrative registers (including work on computerized record linkage procedures);

(b) matters of census confidentiality;

(c) respondent resistance (e.g. due to invasion of privacy concerns);

(d) edit and imputation procedures;

(e) census under and over enumeration (including problems in measuring coverage errors in the census);

(f) quality of census data (content errors);

(g) census costs;

(h) new developments in computer technology;

(i) census products and census markets.

V. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

17. As stated earlier in this paper, the main purpose of the Conference's in-depth review of the project on population and housing censuses is to provide the Conference with an opportunity to consider the main types of work it has undertaken in the past on population and housing censuses, the methods it has used to perform that work, its current and planned future work on censuses, and possible new types of work which it might wish to consider undertaking in the future in the field of population and housing censuses. In short, the in-depth review is intended to permit the Conference to assess the direction of its past, present and planned future work on population and housing censuses, and whether it should branch out into new directions in the future.

18. In addition to considering possible new types of work on censuses identified in the present note and in the companion papers prepared by Bulgaria, Canada, Hungary, Poland and the United States, the Conference may also wish to take other factors into account such as the following ones:

(i) the conclusions reached by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-third session concerning the 1990 World Population and Housing Census Programme;

(ii) the co-ordination of the Conference's planned work on the preparation of ECE regional variant of the 1990 recommendations with related work planned by the Statistical Commission on the preparation of the World Programme (and in particular, the organization of the work to avoid duplication of work);

(iii) criteria to be used when deciding whether to undertake new types of work on population and housing censuses (these might include, for example, the relevance, importance and/or extent of interest in the proposed new types of work to a large number of countries in the region);

(iv) under which programme element to include the new work (i.e. under programme element 12.4.4 or another one);

(v) amount of resources available to the secretariat and countries for new work on population and housing censuses;

(vi) scheduling of work on possible new activities (i.e. prior to, concurrent with or subsequent to the previously planned work on the preparation of the new set of recommendations); and

(vii) priority of proposed new work on population and housing censuses in comparison to previously planned activities in the Conference's programme of work, particularly in the field of social and demographic statistics.